

**Environmental Assessment/
Programmatic Section 4(f) Evaluation
for Proposed Interchange Improvements to I-196 at
Chicago Drive (Baldwin Street) in Georgetown Township and the
City of Grandville, Ottawa and Kent Counties, Michigan**



Public Hearing

Thursday, January 5, 2006

4:00 PM to 8:00 PM

Georgetown Township Hall

1515 Baldwin Street

Jenison, Michigan



INTRODUCTION

This brochure provides information on the public hearing and summarizes the Environmental Assessment (EA) and Programmatic Section 4(f) Evaluation for proposed improvements to I-196 at Chicago Drive (Baldwin Street) in Georgetown Township and the city of Grandville, in Ottawa and Kent counties, Michigan. The purpose of this public hearing is to solicit comments on the EA. The EA describes and analyzes the alternatives considered and provides information on the Preferred Alternative that was identified. MDOT will consider necessary modifications to the Preferred Alternative based on the comments from the public and agencies.

STUDY BACKGROUND

The I-196/Chicago Drive interchange was constructed in the 1970s as part of the I-196 freeway extension west from Grand Rapids to Holland. I-196 connects to I-94 near Benton Harbor and serves as the primary route from Grand Rapids to Chicago. Over the past 15 years MDOT and local agencies have implemented various improvements on existing state highways and local roads to alleviate the traffic issues associated with the interchange area and local access to the I-196 freeway. However, more wide-ranging improvements are necessary to ease current congestion in the I-196/Chicago Drive interchange vicinity.

In 1998, MDOT began the Interchange Access Justification Report (IAJR) process to determine the feasibility of this proposed project and its impact on I-196 freeway traffic operations (available upon request). The conceptual alternative identified in the IAJR included a new westbound off-ramp and a new eastbound on-ramp connecting a proposed extension of Baldwin Street to I-196. The IAJR was completed and approved by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in 2000, contingent upon completion of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) clearance process.

PURPOSE OF PROJECT

The purpose of this proposed project is to enhance mobility along I-196 for traffic traveling between eastern Ottawa County and the Grand Rapids metropolitan area. This will be accomplished by developing a safe and efficient transportation improvement which addresses traffic safety, operational concerns, and access issues. The proposed project will assure the I-196 freeway, the I-196/Chicago Drive interchange area, and the connecting surface roads will meet current and future travel demands in the study area. Specific objectives of the proposed project include the following:

- Improve access between the Georgetown Charter Township (Jenison) area and the Grand Rapids metropolitan area.
- Relieve congestion, enhance traffic operations, and improve safety on the I-196 freeway, the I-196/Chicago Drive interchange, and the connecting surface road system.
- Reduce travel restrictions caused by the Main Street at-grade (CSX) railroad crossing and the geographic limitations within the study area.
- Improve Emergency Medical Service access to and from the study area.
- Enhance mobility within the study area, while minimizing negative natural environment, cultural, economic, and social impacts.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Population growth and travel patterns have resulted in increased traffic congestion on county roads and state highways in the study area. This traffic growth and congestion has reached the point where it now impacts the interstate highway system operations as noted in the IAJR. The I-196 interchange at Chicago Drive, in its current configuration, is the primary freeway access point for the Jenison area. Due in part to the proximity of the Grand River, most traffic from the Georgetown Township area is funneled to this interchange point, from Baldwin Street, Main Street, and Chicago Drive. This funnel effect is complicated by an at-grade railroad crossing of the CSX Railroad at Main Street.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

The Preferred Alternative includes two additional ramps, westbound (WB) off and eastbound (EB) on, connecting I-196 directly with Baldwin Street, just north of Chicago Drive. The two new ramps will connect with the existing WB off and EB on-ramps utilizing the existing weave/merge lane on I-196 WB, and constructing a new weave/merge lane along I-196 EB, all located between the M-11 (28th Street) and Chicago Drive interchanges. These ramps and mainline traffic operations previously were analyzed by MDOT and approved by FHWA in a "Request for Additional I-196 Access" report in 2000. The new EB on-ramp and WB off-ramp will be located under the I-196 mainline, along and north of the CSX rail line, requiring replacement of two freeway mainline bridges over the rail line.

This project provides access from the I-196 freeway to the Jenison area without crossing the rail line, as required by the current Chicago Drive ramps. This will reduce travel restrictions and delays, improve emergency service access, enhance freeway traffic flow and safety, and provide additional capacity to address projected traffic growth in the area.

The two new ramps join together just east of Rush Creek and a new single span bridge will be constructed over the creek. At the new Rush Creek bridge, there are two EB lanes and one WB lane, widening to two WB lanes at the relocated Grandville wastewater treatment plant entrance and non-motorized trail head parking area. The limited access designation for the new ramps and MDOT jurisdiction ends at this point. From the new treatment plant entrance, west to the Main Street intersection, the ramps become Baldwin Street under the jurisdiction of the Ottawa County Road Commission.

The existing Baldwin Street section will be realigned and widened from two lanes to five lanes up to the Main Street intersection. A sidewalk will be provided on the north side, terminating at the treatment plant service drive as requested by the township. On the south side of Baldwin Street, adjacent to the church at Main Street, only the existing sidewalk will be replaced. At the Main Street intersection,

Baldwin Street is five lanes on both sides of Main Street, plus an additional EB to SB right-turn lane to Main Street; and Main Street is changed to a "T" intersection at Baldwin Street, with a traffic signal installed. The Main Street leg of the intersection is shifted slightly and remains a four-lane section.

The entrance to the Grandville wastewater treatment plant will be relocated from Old Chicago Drive to the new location indicated, north of and parallel to Baldwin Street. It will connect to Baldwin Street, just west of Rush Creek. This new entrance and connecting service drive will include a new crossing of Rush Creek, and the closing of two vehicular at-grade railroad crossings on Old Chicago Drive, as well as the existing service drive into the plant. The new service drive bridge will be a single span over Rush Creek. The bridge and service drive will be 43 feet wide (including bridge barrier and railings) to accommodate two travel lanes and non-motorized traffic.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS ASSESSED

MDOT and FHWA have conducted a review of potential social, economic, and environmental impacts associated with the proposed project. Impacts that had a reasonable possibility for individual or cumulative significant impacts also were analyzed. The result of this analysis and measures to minimize short-term impacts during construction are discussed in the document.

While no displacement of residential or commercial structures is anticipated, MDOT will need to acquire some right-of-way along the north side of Baldwin Street in the vicinity of the project. Partial property acquisitions will be required from the city of Grandville, Georgetown Township Fire Department, Jenison Baptist Temple, and a commercial strip shopping center.

The proposed project will enhance mobility in the local area as well as between Georgetown Township and the Grand Rapids metro area. The project will improve safety and operations at the existing I-196/Chicago Drive (Baldwin Street) interchange as well as improving response times for emergency services. Because motorists will

no longer have to cross the CSX railroad at-grade, area businesses and residents will encounter fewer travel restrictions once the interchange modifications are complete.

TRAIL IMPACTS STUDIED

This study contains a Programmatic Section 4(f) Evaluation for the proposed improvements because of the impact to a non-motorized trail. Section 4(f) of the federal Department of Transportation Act requires that an evaluation be prepared when the proposed action may have an adverse effect on a property eligible for or listed on the National Register of Historic Places or may impact publicly owned land from a park, recreation area, or wildlife/waterfowl refuge of national, state or local significance.

The proposed improvements will allow for future non-motorized trail construction by the city of Grandville, pending completion of their plans. The replaced I-196 bridges over Buck Creek will allow connectivity between the trailhead parking area and the local city trail system.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Throughout the course of the study, public participation and agency coordination has taken place. Input received from the public and agencies has been carefully considered and integrated into the study process.

PUBLIC HEARING FORMAT

The January 5, 2006, public hearing for this project will be an open forum meeting. No formal presentation will be made. This format will allow the public to gather information on a one-to-one basis with MDOT staff, and allow citizens to express their concerns, and provide detailed input regarding specific project components.

Citizens can fill out a comment form and deposit it into the comment box. Comments and letters also can be mailed, faxed or emailed. Contact details are located at the end of this brochure.

A court reporter will be available to record verbal statements. Participants interested in making a statement or comment about the proposed project may do so at any time during

the hearing. **All comments postmarked by the January 20, 2006, deadline will appear in the official transcript of this public hearing.**

DOCUMENT AVAILABLE

The EA will be available for public review at the following locations until at least January 20, 2006, when public comments are due:

- Georgetown Township Offices, 1515 Baldwin St., Jenison
- Georgetown Charter Township Library, 1525 Baldwin St., Jenison
- Grandville City Clerk, 3195 Wilson Ave., SW, Grandville
- Grandville Branch Kent District Library, 4055 Maple St., SW, Grandville
- Grand Valley Metropolitan Council, 40 Pearl St., N.W. Suite 410, Grand Rapids
- MDOT Grand Rapids Transportation Service Center, 1420 Front Avenue, N.W., Grand Rapids
- MDOT Bureau of Transportation Planning, 425 Ottawa St., Lansing

The document also is available on-line at www.michigan.gov/mdotstudies

NEXT STEPS

The environmental clearance for this project is scheduled to be completed in January 2006. After reviewing the public hearing transcript and agency comments on the EA, comments will be addressed and any necessary modifications to the Preferred Alternative will be considered in the request for a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). Following submittal of this documentation to FHWA, the issuance of a FONSI would clear the way for design, right-of-way and construction to proceed in 2007-08.

COMMENTS

Your comments are important and should be addressed to:

Robert H. Parsons, Public Hearings Officer
Michigan Department of Transportation

P.O. Box 30050

Lansing, MI 48909

Email: parsonsb@michigan.gov

Fax: (517) 373-9255

I-196 AT CHICAGO DRIVE (BALDWIN STREET) INTERCHANGE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT COMMENT FORM

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) has prepared an Environmental Assessment and Programmatic Section 4(f) Evaluation for proposed improvements to I-196 at Chicago Drive (Baldwin Street) in Georgetown Township and the city of Grandville. This is your opportunity to comment on the Environmental Assessment (EA), which provides background on the project and presents the Preferred Alternative.

GET INVOLVED!

Your comments are important and will become a matter of public record. All supporting documentation to the Environmental Assessment will be prepared after the close of the comment period on January 20, 2006. All relevant comments received on the EA will be summarized and responded to in the supporting documentation.

* * * PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY * * *

Name	E-mail	
Address		
City	State	Zip

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK.

Please use the space below and additional pages if necessary. Turn your comment form in at the public hearing, or give your comments verbally to the court recorder. If you wish, you may mail, fax or e-mail them (see below).

Please return this form before you leave or mail or fax it by January 20, 2006 to:
Mr. Robert H. Parsons, Public Hearings Officer
Michigan Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 30050
Lansing, MI 48909
Fax: 517.373.9255